

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

FINE ARTS

I. SCOPE

This overview focuses on the collection of printed art-related materials in the Library of Congress. This includes materials from the general book and periodical collections on the visual arts, architecture, sculpture, graphic arts, painting, and print media. This summary does not address the vast collections of the Prints and Photographs Division (see the overview for Fine and Decorative Arts – Non-book Materials), the Rare Book Division, or other special format collections in the Library, which are especially rich in art related fields. For additional information, see the Collections Policy Statement for Fine and Decorative Arts – Books and Periodicals

The Fine and Decorative Arts collections in the Library of Congress have developed over time and are the natural outgrowth of the nucleus of materials included in Thomas Jefferson's library. Jefferson, who could be described as a Renaissance man, was interested in most aspects of human endeavor. He was known for his interest in the applied and mechanical arts that would be known today as the decorative arts. The theory and practice of architecture was also of particular importance to Thomas Jefferson, who was himself an architect, and was always concerned with improving buildings and grounds. For this reason, Jefferson's library included several seminal architectural treatises by eminent architects from antiquity (Vitruvius), the Renaissance (Palladio, Serlio, Vignola, Alberti), and from Britain (Inigo Jones and James Gibbs). Jefferson was also inquisitive about the fine arts. Various treatises on the theory of painting and the visual arts, and various works containing biographies of artists reflect Jefferson's interest in these fields.

II. SIZE

The Library maintains a research level collection in every major sub-discipline of the fine arts. An October 2007 search of the Library's Online Catalog showed a total of approximately 407,903 titles in all parts of the N class (which includes fine and most decorative arts). In addition, the Library has an extensive collection of dissertations both in print and online. As of July 2008, a keyword search in *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* using the word "art" brought up more than 70,202 dissertations and masters' theses. A similar search using the words "architecture" and "fine arts" yielded 27,950 and 13,410 dissertations and masters' theses respectively. The Library also makes an effort to acquire major art microform collections through copyright deposit.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

Because of copyright deposits, the Library has a very strong collection of book and serials about art, published in this country. Exchange and gift arrangements with major

museums, libraries, and other types of art related organizations in this country and abroad are responsible for good collections of publications from those institutions.

In the field of fine arts, the Library collects broadly but not in an all-inclusive fashion in anyone particular area. According to the Research Libraries Group Conspectus, the Library of Congress consistently ranks at a research level of collecting in the major fields of the fine arts including: eighteenth century art, nineteenth century art, twentieth century art, primitive art, economics and art, Medieval art, and the decorative arts. Because of the breadth and depth of the entire collection, the Library also provides strong support material for increasingly popular interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary studies (e.g. American studies) involving all the arts. Several large and important microform collections, including *Dissertation Abstracts International*, contribute to the overall strength of fine arts materials.

The Library also selectively collects auction catalogs from the major European and American houses. This represents an important research collection and an invaluable research tool. This material is supplemented and further supported by various electronic databases including *ArtFirst* and *SCIPIO*.

IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

The Library has notable collections in areas that complement distinguished format collections. Examples are books and serials on graphic arts and architecture, especially in the U.S. and Europe. Other highlights are the illustrated works in the Library's collection of books on travel and exploration. The Library also collects extensively in medieval art, as no other local institution acquires materials comprehensively in this area.

V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Various electronic databases to which the Library of Congress subscribes cover a broad range of topics applicable to the study of Fine and Decorative Arts. Due to the broad and interdisciplinary nature of the topics, many databases, both general and specific, include valuable information related to these fields. Databases and electronic sources that are frequently consulted and that comprise invaluable resources for the study of fine and decorative arts include: *Digital Dissertations*, *Art Index*, *Art Index Retrospective*, *Artifact Bibliography on the History of Art (BHA)*, *Design and Applied Arts Index (DAAI)*, *Avery Index of Architectural Periodicals*, *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, *Index to Nineteenth-Century Art Periodicals*, and numerous other applicable titles. Some titles offer both current and retrospective coverage, and many provide full-text coverage. In addition, the Library's subscription to *JSTOR* offers full-text articles in significant academic journals. *JSTOR* includes 22 titles in the field of Architecture and Architectural History and 72 titles in the field of Art and Art History. The American Memory project is a digital record of American history and creativity, and as such includes many art-related materials and information.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

In spite of its enormous breadth, the Library's collections could be improved in certain areas of the fine and decorative arts. More effort should be made to collect exhibit catalogs and, in some instances, monographs of less than 50 pages. Often these types of publications are the only source of information on lesser known artists or movements, especially from foreign countries. Exhibit catalogs often reflect the latest scholarship, information, and/or interpretation on a given artist or movement.